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ABSTRACT

Geographers can extend beyond their discipline into a wider community by offering answers to questions posed by the public and by communicating the knowledge geography offers. Public questions with which geographers can be most helpful are those that seek to determine flows of the settlement system and geographic processes that alter the system: where to build, preserve, sell, abandon, buy, and plant; which places to connect; and how to connect them. Further, geographers must be able to communicate and teach the concepts within which they operate: map verbalization and map quantification. Geographers need an organizational base to pursue their dialogue with a wider community; it may be an academic department of a university, a corporate location analysis department, or an office of planning and research for a state's natural resources management. Thus, when geography communicates with the wider community, it creates a constituency and, appropriately, job opportunities. The more directly geography is related to the community, the more likely its substance, coherence, purpose, and priorities will be enhanced. (KC)

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# GEOGRAPHY'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY AND REGION

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Let me say, first, what the terms in this title mean to me.

The "Community" means those people who are not full-time geographers, and organizations of people other than geographers. "Regions" are geographically bounded networks of people and places with common, important problems. Both terms imply that we are talking about settlements -- collections of physical structures of all sorts that reflect ideas and are attached to the land.

"Geography" is one way of selecting things to observe in the world around us, assembling the observations, and thinking about them. Its observations are descriptive of the physical and cultural features of human settlements and their natural settings. Geography assembles its data on maps or, at worst, on proxies for maps. The discipline considers data in terms of geographic patterns and changes in pattern. In order to guide its thinking, it asks questions about human settlements and seeks answers. In order to identify the questions, it explores. Geography studies human settlements at the scales and levels of generalization at which maps, map symbols, and legends are necessary for understanding. Geography's continuing quest is to understand the changing pattern of human settlement on the earth.

Finally, Geography itself is in part an institution within the wider community. It is a collection of academic departments, research firms,

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public agencies, and individuals in a variety of occupations who are linked by organizations and journals, including this association.

How will geographers relate geography, the wider community, and the region to one another in the 1980s? My response to that question is addressed to the members of this association, although that group comprises only a part of the population of practitioners in the field of geography.

The most immediate and direct, day-to-day relationship of most geographers to the wider community is through their own lives and their students. The students belong to the wider community. They are learning about it, making judgments about it, helping to reinforce some parts of it, modify some parts and dissolve some. Professional geographers are doing the same things. But also, like other adults, they are inducting, training, and educating the younger members of the community. Since many geographers are college teachers, they have an especially important responsibility in education.

If geography is a way of posing questions and seeking answers about the changing patterns of human settlement, the obvious task is to see what questions are being asked in the wider community and which ones are consonant with geography's continuing quest to understand those patterns. What problems are people in the wider community trying to think about? How can geography help? As members of many parts of the wider community, we seek those questions wherever they might be found. The questions might be asked in our own journals. But if they are important to the wider community, they are usually being asked at the same time, or earlier, widely and repeatedly by thousands or millions of people. They might be old, fundamental, persistent questions asked by early masters and clawed over by subsequent generations of scholars. But our wider community also has old,

fundamental, persistent questions. The public questions with which geography can be especially helpful are questions of location: questions that ask in one way or another where people are in geographic structure and flows of the settlement system and the geographic processes that alter the system. They are questions of "Where" and "Why There": where to build, where to preserve, where to abandon, where to help, where to sell, where to buy, where to give, where to take, where to plant, what places to connect and where to connect them. The questions of most importance are usually those which affect the most land, the most people, or both. It seems that the most important questions geography would want to ask are also the very important, persistent questions in the wider communities of students, their elders, and the geographers' peers.

Of course, what geography learns, it must communicate. That means geography must talk to the wider community to a very important degree in the language of maps. To most new students and adult peers that is a foreign language. Unlike the languages of words and numbers, it lies mostly outside their formal education and daily experience. Its essential terminology of place names is not in most dictionaries. You can look up Moscow or Wichita, for example, in atlases but not satisfactorily in dictionaries. And you can read what the atlases tell you only if you can read the meaning from maps. That requires, furthermore, that you be able to translate back and forth between maps, words, and numbers -- to verbalize and quantify maps, to conceptualize maps from words and numbers. Those language skills come at all levels from the most elementary to the most advanced. They are essential if the wider community is to know geography and if geography is to serve the wider community.

Thus geographers are always challenged to teach the concepts of scale,

legend, gradient, region, route, node, map generalization, map verbalization, map quantification. Beyond that they are always challenged to teach the discipline of maps: the geographical limits of generalization, the basic intellectual need for selection, theme, and design. We teach this rich language by practice and example to all of our clients from the wider community -- students, civic groups, task forces and activists, legislators, public administrators, and business people of all sorts.

The basic language and related logic of geography is so little known. Yet the understanding it seeks is so widely needed. Bridging that gap gives every practitioner in the field, regardless of whether he is called a teacher or not, the challenge, opportunities, and frustrations of teaching.

But language is only half of our communication problem. There is also the need for sensitivity to the wider community -- to hear, see, and ask. The body of relevant knowledge of places is partly in traditional libraries and publications. But much of it is fugitive. Finding it requires an appreciation of the pluralism of natural forces, human actors, and networks that comprise the settlement system. Development of that appreciation is really the essence of field work. There is a need to identify with one organization or another as its student or teacher, yet all the while to maintain one's integrity as a scholar. Again these skills come at all levels. Geographers are challenged to practice them in all of their work with the wider community -- with classroom students or clients for applied work,. Like literacy in the language of maps, these skills of breadth and humility are essential to the whole society.

If geography goes to the wider community for an important share of its questions, and communicates with the wider community as it formulates

and pursues those questions, it finds itself with a constituency. Alumni, private citizens, and leaders have found geography helpful in both practical and intellectual ways. The community needs geography, and geography needs a constituency.

To pursue their dialogue with the wider community, geographers must continue to operate from an organizational base. As we cultivate our local, regional, or national clientele, we do so as representatives of the "field". We are the face of geography and its stewards in the society. Each department is an outpost and a store. It might be the academic department at my university, the corporate location analysis department in a major retailing firm's downtown headquarters, or the office of planning research for the state's natural resources management in the state capitol. All are applying the work of geography in communities and regions, and all are adding to the field's fund of knowledge and experience. Geography helps to give them an identity, and they help to give geography an identity.

To me, this means that the field must have substance, coherence, purpose, and priorities. To be sure, there must be specialization, because the potential amount of substance is so large. But there must also be coherence. That coherence can come from our common language of maps and our common quest for understanding the changing pattern of human settlement. Our purpose and priorities can come from our interaction with the wider community. It is not clear to me how, in an open society, coherence, purpose, and priorities in the field of geography can come in any other way.

I have said nothing about the nuts and bolts of curriculum, internships, placement, jobs, applied research, adjunct faculties, and liberal education. Nor have I speculated about the changing actual community and regional environments in which geographers will be working in the 1980s:

major changes in geographic distribution of population, income, capital allocation, resource exploitation, foreign trade, and foreign migration; shifts in the distribution of job creation in both public and private enterprise and between large organizations and small. I have been talking about central policies and commitments.

Suppose you find a geographer or a group of geographers who are committed full time to the quest for understanding of the changing pattern of human settlement; who help the wider community to formulate its large, persistent geographical questions; who communicate what they learn through the language of maps; who work at improving the effectiveness of map communication.

Where you find those geographers, do you also find job opportunities, a constituency that includes significant numbers of organizations and individuals who are familiar with geography's contributions? Do you also find a collegiate body who think geography is important in a liberal education, and a wider community in which a significant number of people think a liberal education, including geography, is important to the community itself?

Suppose we mapped and examined the location of this kind of geographer or group of geographers in America. To which communities do they relate? What regions? What are their research topics? What are the products? Who are the users? What are the appropriate measures of their quality and contribution to geography's quest? To the wider scientific quest? To the improvement of the human condition? What would be the dominant common interest that would bring them together in a convention like this one? Would it be their techniques? Or their theories? Or their curiosity about

communities and regions? Or roughly equal shares of all three interests?

And how would the relative weights of those interests be reflected in the content and structure of the convention program? Might at least one-third of the program be organized around specific regions, typed perhaps according to size of region and categories of community problems? Might those regional sessions bring together people from varied topical specialties? You might find someone who, for example, has been locating discount stores in central Texas, others who have been studying floods and floodplain regulation, school aids, and twentieth-century Hispanic population changes in the same region. Or you might find people reporting on new boom towns, 19th-century narrow-gauge railroad development, national forest campground use, and Mormon haystacks in the central Intermountain West. Or 1980 commuting patterns, twentieth-century changes in retail function, recent elderly population concentrations and migration, and highway maintenance planning priorities for small towns in the Midwest. People in those regional sessions might find it challenging, entertaining, stimulating, and useful to come together to discuss and practice that basic, distinctive geographer's skill -- synthesis.

In fact, applied studies are always studies of particular regions, nodes, and routes. The task is not to locate the median store in the modal place. It is to locate specific stores in a specific metropolitan area. Or to forecast traffic or cargo flows in a corridor between two places that aren't like any other places. Or to describe and interpret the resources of a particular Third World state which is like no other. In my experience, the particular contribution geography makes to the wider community when it addresses such subjects is to place them in their particular context in the relevant changing settlement pattern. Geography,

the scientific community, and the wider community all benefit from that work; and students at many levels benefit from appropriate description of how it was done, what the findings were, how they were communicated, and how they were used.

The more directly we relate geography to the wider community, the more likely we are to deepen and enrich its substance and to develop coherence, purpose, and priorities. The 1980s offer the earliest opportunity to improve further our performance on all of those counts.